

OBTAINING FOOD BY PRIMITIVE METHODS

Advanced Lecture

Introduction:

MAN AND NATURE

Since man first appeared on the earth he has demonstrated his ability to survive. In every part of the world - the towering plateaus of Tibet, the steaming Malayan jungles, the deserts of Australia, and the ice flees of the Arctic seas - man has looked hunger and the elements in the eye and come out on top. That is why we are able to gather here today and talk about it. It's a family matter!

As Americans our main trouble is that we eat too well. We are accustomed to picking and choosing. This one doesn't like fat, that one doesn't like mince pie, and the other one can't eat eggs without salt and pepper. So, in getting the best use out of wilderness foods we start out "back of the eight ball". The sad part of it is that 90 per cent of these foolish ideas are in our heads, for we can afford to be foolish.

Take the great American picnic standby - hot dogs. As a nation we dote on them. How are they made? Colonel Potter can give you the answer. They put every part of the animal into a hot dog except the fertilizer - and that is explaining it politely! No food you can eat in the wilderness can compete with a hot dog!

METHODS OF OBTAINING PRIMITIVE FOODS:

1. The large animals such as caribou, reindeer, moose, seals, black bears, etc. will be secured with the SAC survival rifle. The ammunition should never be used on small game except in a case of emergency.

2. Some of the younger large animals, such as yearling moose and caribou, could be snared under unusually favorable circumstances. Smaller members of the big game bracket such as the Eurasian roebuck could be snared without great difficulty.

3. All of the smaller mammals can be snared without difficulty. Lynx, foxes, small bears can be snared or killed in deadfalls, but when the labor of constructing a deadfall requires considerable time, it is better practice to set a number of snares for smaller game.

4. Throughout the northern areas of Eurasia and North America the Arctic hare and the willow ptarmigan will form the major part of the game caught in snares during the winter months. A kind providence has endowed them with lack of brains and excellent edible properties.

5. The smaller rodents, such as lemmings and field mice, may sometimes be caught in their hibernating nests beneath the snow. Birds that winter in the North, such as camp-robbers (jays) and chickadees, have a very valuable place in survival for even if too small to make a meal for a hungry man, one small chickadee can be instrumental in feeding a large party when used for bait on a trot-line.

This brings us to one of the most important items in survival foods:

FISH.

Many The lakes, rivers and streams of the north temperate, sub-Arctic and Arctic zones produce astronomical numbers of fish. It has been stated that the waters of Great Slave Lake, alone, produce enough fish to supply the inhabitants of North America. Furthermore, the capture of fish can be carried on both summer and winter.

BIRDS

The summer migrants of the North arrive in the early spring in countless thousands. They are of the utmost importance to the survivor, for in addition to the meat they furnish their eggs are easily collected and boiled hard, can be kept for a considerable period.

PLANT FOODS

While northern climes do not compare with the tropics in the variety and value of their plant foods, experiments by the survivor will uncover many edible roots and berries of real food value. For a short period during the autumn berries grow in great numbers. Boiled in fat in the Indian manner they will last some time. Bulbs of the Kamchatka Lily, the roots and green shoots of the cattail in the north temperate swamp, the wild onion and the berries of the lowgrowing bear berry plant, also known as Kinnikinnik, are found as far north as the Arctic Circle.

OTHER FOODS

In fact, any living creature that wiggles in a pond or scuttles through the grass is meat for the survivor's pot. Shellfish are found along the Arctic beaches. Frog legs are recognized as a delicacy as well as the snails so highly regarded in France. Tripe, to those educated to appreciate it, is one of the world's finest foods. The predigested food in the first stomach of a caribou is eaten by all the northern natives. Its taste is not unpleasant and it serves to break the monotony of a straight meat diet.

PSYCHOLOGY OF FOOD PREFERENCES AND DISLIKES

It has been proved by scientific tests that the inability of individuals to eat certain foods is 90 per cent or more mental. "I can't eat fat", "I can't eat food without salt", are two remarks frequently heard. In survival you can't afford to have dislikes. All wild food is cleaner than the foods we eat in civilization. If you don't put gas in your car it won't run; if you don't eat any wild food that comes your way - you won't run either.

SEASONS

There are two seasonal changes in the food supply in northern areas: Summer and winter.

Summer is the time of plenty. Migrating wildfowl cover the cliffs of ocean beaches and islands and every marsh is populated with geese, ducks, curlews, and snipe. Even a small snipe or plover lays eggs that are much larger in comparison to their size than other birds. Seagull eggs are exceedingly good eating. The thin filament that separates the meat from the eggshell can have a slightly fishy taste, but if you break the shell and cook the egg in a pan with grease (caribou or other animal fat), you will find them as good as hen's eggs.

In the earth banks above the cliffs you will find burrows that resemble fox dens. These are made by the two species of puffins or "sea parrots" as they are called. The burrows are only about 3 or 4 feet deep, so you can dig out the bird and eggs without much trouble. The puffins' feet are armed with very sharp claws, so before you begin feeling for them put on a glove or wrap your hand in a piece of cloth. Besides - it might be a fox hole after all!

Sea beaches in friendly country are storehouses of food. Fish, birds and shellfish abound in unbelievable numbers. A party traveling the Bering Sea beach found three sharks between 5 and 7 feet long that had just become stranded in shallow water, within a few minutes walk of each other.

GROUND ANIMALS (small mammals)

With the coming of warm weather, the small hibernating animals appear in countless thousands. They consist of marmots, in hilly country, ground squirrels and meadow mice of several varieties. The advantage in catching these small mammals is that they put on a heavy coating of fat during the summer months, and even though you may dislike fat in civilization, you will crave it in survival living, particularly after your sugar has gone. You can snare ground squirrels with a loop made of any thin line tied to a limber stick. If they cannot reach their holes and hide in a rock pile, you can locate them by pawing the rocks around and puffing like a bear. When they think a bear is after them they will start to squeal and you can locate them.

You will not need to bother about rabbits during the summer as more appetizing food is easy to get, but ptarmigan are always available. During the summer months they are easy to kill with rocks, and, if you use patience and move around them slowly, they will become accustomed to your presence and you can get within a few feet of them. On windy days they, like some other species of game birds, are more difficult to approach.

WATERFOWL

The waterfowl molt during the end of July and for a short period are unable to fly. This condition can be of help to the survivor in capturing geese and the larger varieties of ducks. Young ducks have about reached their full growth before they can fly. They are called "flappers" by hunters and are very good to eat.

BIG GAME

Big game animals will be well scattered during the summer months. The cows are taking care of their young, the bulls are growing their antlers. Mountain game will be on the highest ground available. Moose will usually be near water. Summer hunting is not difficult as there is ample cover for stalking, but thick cover can be a drawback as game can be difficult to locate in thick brush.

While it is better under survival conditions to kill the smaller animals as they are easier to carry, the meat of young calves, either moose or caribou, is rather insipid and carries little fat. It is better to kill yearlings or even two-year olds. The meat is better. The skin of a mountain sheep or caribou killed in August is in ideal condition for use as clothing, ground cloth to sleep on, insoles, etc.

The fact emerges, therefore, that survival living in northern zones during the summer months is not difficult. Survival at any time is a man's job, but the variety of food available, plus the lack of adverse weather conditions greatly reduces the amount of physical effort required for bodily well being.

FISH

Fish is one of the survivor's main standbys. One can ^{not however} say with a ^{any} considerable degree of accuracy that in northern zones where there is water, there are fish. To the static fish populations, summer adds the great "runs" or spawning migrations of salt water fish - the salmon and eulachon, called "hooligans" by northerners. The salmon requires no introduction here, but the hooligan is little known outside of the Northwest and Alaskan rivers. It is a small 6 - 8 inch fish that during the

early summer swarms up northern rivers in such dense masses that a man armed with a dip net, or even a cooking pail, can dip out all he needs. They are so fat that when dried they will burn like a candle and for this reason they were known as "candlefish" among the early settlers along the north Pacific coast. Even after lying on a sandbar for several days, the upper portion is still edible. Smoked, they are of great value as a survival food.

In addition, there are many other species that are readily caught in lakes and streams: Trout, whitefish, grayling, Northern pike, and kusk. A little known fish named the inconnu (unknown fish) by the French voyageurs in Northern Canada, grows to a weight of more than 60 lbs. It is a powerful fighter and its meat is delicious. On the Yukon it is called "Gennie"; among the Eskimos it is known as "She Fish". It can be caught with spinners and streamer flies. All of the fish mentioned above with the exception of the whitefish and kusk can be caught with flies, spinners or plugs. The whitefish is usually caught in nets. The kusk takes bait readily. The liver of the kusk is very large and is looked upon as a delicacy in the North.

One of the most effective devices for survival fishing is a medium size hook lashed to a length of bale-wire. The wire resembles a root or submerged grass and they show no alarm when the hook is slowly placed beneath them. A steady pull brings the fish onto the bank. This method is easier than "tickling", as catching fish by hand is called.

Fishing calls for patience, intelligent observation and experimentation. In survival it is one of your most important food getting procedures.

A line running from a sinker in deep water to a stake by the water's edge and with baited hooks tied on at intervals is called a trot-line or night-line. As the latter indicates, its value lies in the fact that it will catch fish while you sleep. The best method of setting a trot-line is illustrated in Diagram No. 29 titled "the OTTER Trot-Line and Troll". The Norwegian "Otter" can be easily made under primitive conditions and is of great value in fishing deep lakes without the aid of a boat.

WINTER

The main difficulty in winter survival consists in securing food while taking all necessary precautionary steps to carry on winter techniques such as the erection of shelters, procurement of ample firewood and mastering use of clothing and travel methods.

In some ways the procuring of food is easier in the winter than in the summer. It is true that all the migratory birds have left and that many of the smaller animals have hibernated in their underground homes.

Big game and the smaller animals that remain are, however, more easy to snare or hunt than during the summer time as the tracks made by big game are a great help to the hunter and the trails made by smaller game in the snow are a help in snaring procedures.

Rabbits and ptarmigan will furnish a good part of the food supply and both are easily snared. Both rabbits and ptarmigan go through a cycle of increase lasting for several years and then drop to a sudden "low" through disease. In the intermediate periods they are numerous and during the height of their cycle they are found in extraordinary numbers. A party of men who had camped on the headwaters of the Kantishna River during the late winter found the snow so filled with rabbit droppings and urine that

for a period of ten days when the spring "run-off" occurred they could not make a cup of tea that did not taste of rabbit.

Rabbit trails follow the willow thickets in parallel lines in every valley and by setting simple noose snares in each "run" or trail, enough rabbits are easily caught. (Diagram No. 22, "Snares and Snaring".)

Ptarmigans "flock-up" during the winter and their favorite wintering grounds are willow covered islands in the lower valleys. They too make trails as rabbits do, which run in every direction between the willow bushes.

After setting the number of noose snares needed, the survivor can begin at the end of the island and slowly drive the birds before him until they arrive at and are caught in the snares.

Most Northerners freeze and skin ptarmigan for cooking as it is quicker than plucking, but the survivor would do well to pluck the birds, for there is considerable nourishment in the skin. Porcupines are easily located by their tracks in the snow which resemble bear cub tracks. They can be killed with a stick and while they taste rather piney from the bark of evergreens, their meat is wholesome.

BIG GAME

When big game is captured, the need for snaring ends. The tracks and trails made by moose and caribou can be seen at long distances. Both animals show up clearly against snow and, provided the hunting is done with skill and caution, winter hunting is not unduly difficult. The frozen meat keeps well and the fat will be of the utmost value in a survival diet.

There is no need or time in this talk to list the animals of Eurasia. Many or all of the North American animals are represented in Asia and Russia.

In fact, there are more Asiatic big game animals in Asia than in the U. S. A., such as roebuck, gazelles and wild pigs. Any man who can survive successfully in northern North America can do likewise in northern Asia.

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